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Daily Information Session—14.236 @ 23:30Z

FR/F6KDF/T Tromelin 2000 DXpedition

by Gil Gautier (F5NOD) and Erwann Merrien (F6JJX)

After the great success of our first DXpedition on Amsterdam Island (FT5ZH) in December, 1998, the Lyon DX Gang and the Gendarmerie de Bron Radio Club (F6KDF) went back on the road to set-up a new DXpedition from a most wanted DXCC entity belonging to France: Tromelin Island (FR/T).

There have been several amateur radio operations from this island in the past but they were sporadic and led by meteorologists or French army officers who operated during their spare time and usually only for a few days. Also, it is very difficult to get landing permission and permission to operate so when we received permission to operate on Tromelin Island from July 31st until mid-August, 2000, we were happy.

The team was composed of members of F6KDF and the Lyon DX Gang. F5NOD, Gil Gautier, and F6JJX, Erwann Merrien, operated CW. F5PXT, Eric Blanchard, and F5PYI, Laurent Borde, operated SSB. RTTY was operated mostly by F5PYI.

Three stations were QRV simultaneously from 160 to 6m depending on propagation openings. The antenna field consisted of the following:

- One 3-element beam for 10m
- Three 3-element beams for 20, 15, 10m



The FR/F6KDF/T Team

Left to right: Eric, F5PXT; Erwann, F6JJX; Larry, F5PYI; and Gil, F5NOD

- One beam, 2 x 3 elements for 12 and 17m
- Two Titanex verticals (V80 & V160)
- One 5-element beam for 6m
- One 30m dipole
- One RX antenna, 100m wire

The most wanted survey on our site showed that CW was the most wanted mode on all bands so we established a plan to maximize propagation openings but, once there, chaotic propagation and solar flares complicated the plans. Gil and I remember being stuck on CW

without a possibility of extracting callsigns because sounds were distorted.

We were only four operators and we did our best to satisfy as many as possible on all bands and modes.

Enroute to Tromelin

We left Lyon on July 31st and arrived at Reunion Island on Sunday morning. When we arrived at the airport, a small welcome committee

(Continued on page 2)

inside...

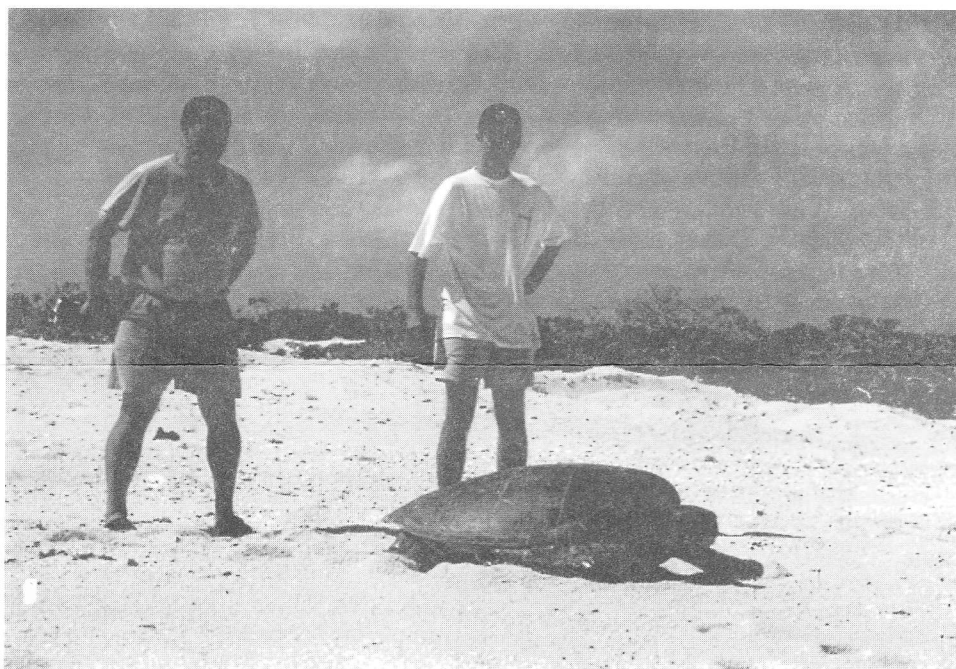
New Life Members

Extra Help

Election Results

IRC Makeover

Tromelin.....from page 1



*Tromelin's Turtle
with Eric, F5PXT (left); and Erwann, F6JJX (right)*

was already there: FR5GQ, Conchita; FR/F1AAY, Didier; and FR/5R8GF, Raphaël.

As early as Sunday afternoon we went to "Meteo France" and the private flight company to finalize details. We spent the night at Conchita's QTH where we received an incredible welcome. It was hard to leave such a friendly place for a remote and hostile island (hi).

On Monday morning F5PXT and F5NOD were the first to wake up at 0600 and they were ready to leave Reunion Island for Tromelin Island. Our plane was a Navajo PA31, a small twin-engine aircraft with 7 seats (pilot and co-pilot included) and a 450 kg cargo limit. The plane was too small to carry everyone and their equipment in a single flight so F5PYI and F6JJX took the second flight to Tromelin with the rest of the equipment.

CQ, CQ, de FR/F6KDF/T

We made our first contact at 2100 local Tromelin time on 20 meters: "F5SIH de FR/F6KDF/T. Are you there, Eric?"

"FR/F6KDF/T de F5SIH. Solid copy, you are 59! Good luck."

After some comments about our arrival

and first impressions, we were ready for 16 days, non-stop. The first evening, three stations were on the air: 40m, 20m, and 15m CW and SSB. The second day we set up the Titanex V160 (26.5m height—what a vertical!). This was a difficult operation for only 4 guys because of the blowing winds and the small shrubs that gripped the ropes. But we won anyway and the second try was the good one.

80% of the time, three stations were on the air—two while we were eating or fixing antennas. Three stations around the clock left us only four hours to sleep; however, we did not land on the island as tourists and we knew the difficulties before we left Lyon, France. We wanted to give FR/T to as many DXers as possible around the world.

On the third day, we learned that a meteo assistant was very ill and confined to bed until he could be repatriated to Reunion Island. A heavy storm chose to blow over Tromelin, no airplane could reach us, and the meteo assistant seemed to suffer a lot. This reminded us to be very careful on such

a remote island. We hoped that the French military Transall would come as soon as possible. The next day the Transall landed on Tromelin with an on-board emergency doctor and our friend returned safely to Reunion Island.

On the same day, a wind-powered generator stopped working properly so now we had one wind-powered generator and the diesel engine generator.

On the radio side, things were better. We strictly managed the pile-ups and we worked 3500-4000 stations per day.

CQ, CQ 160 meters!

From the first days we were QRV on 160m with our vertical antenna and RX 100m wire. The month of August was not the best time for that band but we made around 167 QSOs anyway. The signals were very weak and a QSO could take more than 10 minutes. After 24 hours without sleep that was tricky, but making a QSO on that famous band was always a gift for the lucky ones and we knew it. Nice feeling!

CQ, CQ 6 meters!

"CQ, CQ 6m de FR/F6KDF/T listening on this frequency and 210 for French stations." Everyday the same call. Nothing but QRM. We managed to make 66 QSOs on 6m. Our IC-706 refused to give us more than 3 watts so we had to use one of our two FT-920s. Scheduling was difficult when running only 3 stations with heavy pile-ups. Some guys addicted to 6 meters complained that we only operated on 6m for a few hours but we preferred to give as many new ones as possible on CW and SSB on more exploitable bands. Our choice. We were only four operators!

Changeover on Tromelin

After one week on the island, we learned that a Transall from the French army was coming to visit us with the new Meteo France crew and some fresh food. This created a lot of smiles on everyone's faces!

We had to take down one Titanex close to the landing strip and be ready to switch off the radios because the technicians would try to repair the wind-powered gen-

erator and one of the diesel generators. The diesel generator could not be repaired so it was loaded on the Transall. Jacques, the station officer, was leaving the island and Henri would take his place. Roland, our new chef, also joined us.

That day was a lazy day. No radio was possible because of the technicians so we visited the island for the first time. We wanted to go in the water but the sharks and the high surfs prevented us from making such a mistake. So we walked on the beach and watched the sea birds. A few hours of calm and no QRM were welcome and after one week without much sleep we were tired.

Everyday we enjoyed watching the turtles come on the beach to lay. We even saw little turtles. What a souvenir! The island was also inhabited by millions of hermit crabs that took over the island as soon as the sun faded.

The last two days we saw whales close to the seashore and while making pile-ups we could see them jumping over the water.

Fireworks on Tromelin

In the middle of the second week we suddenly saw flames in our power supplies. No more electricity on Tromelin! In this emergency, we joined the Meteo France crew and began to search for the problem. After a visit to the generator room we saw 300V on the tension indicator instead of 230V. Two of the three power supplies were burned and the PK232 (RTTY modem) was down. We quickly found the guilty equipment. The last wind-powered generator no longer worked properly and was giving us more than the usual power. We contacted Meteo France on Reunion Island and received an order to stop the last wind-powered generator. At that moment, we feared for the DXpedition because we needed a lot of power and all we had now was one old diesel generator and the week was not finished. Everyone on the island met to decide what to do next. We finally decided to stop the generator from 0500 to 0800 local time to reload the diesel and let the generator rest. Jean

Michel, the Meteo France assistant, took care of the generator and we found a car battery with its charger to give us the needed 13.8V (precarious but effective).

More problems

As if this were not enough, F5PYI, Larry, was feeling bad and we suspected he was tired, stressed, or might have suffered sunstroke while working on the antennas. Larry remained in his sleeping bag while waiting for our departure within the next few hours.

FR/F6KDF/T QRT

On the evening of August 15th it was time to QRT because the aircraft was coming to take us on the 17th. We put down all our antennas except for one beam to send news to the French metropole. We spent the next day packing the equipment and in the evening we loaded the aircraft that just landed on Tromelin.

The crew and the F6KDF team spent the last evening around the table for the first time in 16 days. We were happy about the QSOs we made but we were sad to leave our new friends

from Meteo France on this remote island.

On the morning of August 17th, F5PYI, who needed to see a doctor, and F5PXT, were the first to board the aircraft and leave Tromelin. F5NOD and F6JJX were the last to leave the island in the afternoon. This was the end of an incredible adventure in the Indian Ocean.

We will keep in mind forever the time spent together, the good and bad moments, and the hundreds of "thank you for the new one."

We want to thank our many friends and supporters, including INDEXA, who made it possible for us to make 51,046 QSOs with four operators in 15 days.

For more information about our DXpedition, please visit our Web site: <http://perso.easynet.fr/~f6jjx/menu.html>.

(Note: We dedicated FR/F6KDF/T 2000 to the memories of 9A4SP (UNHCR) and KD4SYB (UNHCR) who lost their lives in West Timor.

We also dedicated the DXpedition to our friends: F1JID, Dominique, and F8PX, Paul. Both became silent keys in September, 2000.)

New Life Members.....

W9OSN N1BY K9LA and K7NTW

Extra Help Provided By.....

W5VCS	N1BY	W2CVW	DJ9ZB	N0SU	N7DV	K7TNJ
KC2YD	WA4DOU	KA2PHQ	K2HWE	W8WOJ	W6OSP	AA7XA
KB7V	KT6TT	K1XJ	N2OC	K1KU	K8YC	KB9RPX
K0GED	W1UVJ	YC6LAY	W6NIZ	N4XP	VE7XT	CT1CSN
ZP3CTW	WB6ROH	and	K4ULA			

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W4FRU RETIRES AS QSL MANAGER

John will retire as a QSL manager effective 12-31-01 due to medical problems. His POB 5127 in Suffolk, VA will close also.

Bob Young has all the logs and will continue the service.

Effective a/o now, all request go to:

Bob Young K4JDJ
556 Babbtown Road
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IRCs Get Makeover

by Keith Retzer, W7KEU

IRCs will soon be larger and more attractive!

They will be printed on heavier, check-type paper to allow for machine processing and they will have a distinctive watermark along with a security rainbow, fluorescent zone, and micro-printing of letters. They will also have a bar code and optical character reader (OCR) characters on the back.

The last day for sale of the old IRCs will be December 31, 2001. The new ones will go on sale the next day. Local post offices were allowed to begin ordering the new IRCs in May.

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DXPEDITIONING BASICS

by

Wayne Mills, N7NG

A DXpedition manual co-published by
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